



Haryānvī Language and Regional Identity: A Historical and Socio-Cultural Study

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Abstract

Language is not merely a means of communication; it is a repository of collective memory, cultural traditions, social values, and regional identity. In this context, Haryānvī occupies a distinctive position among the regional varieties of the Indo-Aryan linguistic tradition. Spoken predominantly across Haryana and its adjoining areas, Haryānvī has developed within a diverse historical and socio-cultural environment in which migration, political transformation, geographical proximity, and interaction among different communities have played an important role in shaping its linguistic character. Haryānvī is not represented by a single uniform speech form. Its various regional expressions, commonly associated with names such as Bangru, Jatu, Deswali, Ahirwati, Ranghri, Rohtaki, Khadri, and Powadhi, demonstrate considerable linguistic and cultural diversity. These varieties preserve distinctive patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and local traditions. Rather than viewing such variation as a sign of fragmentation, it may be understood as evidence of the historical depth and cultural richness of the Haryānvī-speaking region. The present study approaches Haryānvī not simply as a regional dialect but as an important vehicle of cultural representation. It explores the relationship between language and regional identity and examines how Haryānvī has preserved folk traditions, social customs, collective memories, and indigenous modes of expression despite changing political, educational, and linguistic circumstances. Particular attention is given to the influence of geographical and historical developments on the formation of its regional varieties.

Keywords:

Haryānvī, Regional Identity, Language and Culture, Folk Tradition, Cultural Memory, Indo-Aryan Languages, Dialectal Diversity, Haryana, Sociolinguistics, Historical Linguistics.

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Introduction to Language

Language is an organ located in the mouth that serves both as a means of verbal expression and as the organ of taste. From the perspective of the philosophy of sound, language emerged as a means of expression. With the creation of Adam (peace be upon him), there arose a need for words through which meanings and intentions could be communicated. These words consisted of different sounds, which in linguistic terminology are represented by letters of the alphabet. Letters are essentially basic sounds that are combined to form words. Maulvi Abdul Haq writes that “letters are the name given to simple sounds when they are brought into written symbols.”

Maulvi Fath Muhammad Khan also demonstrated considerable expertise in the formation of letters. His research concerning letters, their forms, and their phonetic effects is regarded as significant. He explains that the lexical meaning of a word relates to throwing something away or producing something from the mouth, while in technical usage a word refers to something uttered.

These observations demonstrate that language is the principal means of communication. Every region has its own language, just as every region possesses its own civilization and cultural traditions. Language, culture, and civilization together produce the literature of a region, which becomes a custodian of its identity, traditions, and collective memory. Hundreds of languages are spoken across the Indian subcontinent, and each possesses its own social, cultural, and linguistic significance.

Haryanvi is the language of the Haryana region and is therefore known as Haryānvī or Haryanvi. In the past, it has also been called Bangru, Jatu, Deswali, Powadhi, Khadri, Ahirwati, Ranghri, Rohtaki, and by several other names; these names essentially denote its dialects. Haryanvi continues to be spoken in Haryana in several recognized dialectal forms. Before the partition of India, Haryana consisted of four districts—Hisar, Rohtak, Jind, and Karnal—and was part of the Ambala Division.

Haryana is often described as the “Battlefield of India.” Many historical battles took place in this region, and invading forces moving toward Delhi frequently passed through it. Historical accounts also refer to numerous princely families settled within approximately 150 kilometers of Delhi who resisted invading forces with courage. The region was historically underdeveloped, with limited industry and craftsmanship. Pastoralism and agriculture were among the principal occupations. In the absence of an effective canal system, agricultural prosperity depended heavily on rainfall. During periods of drought, people sometimes migrated with their livestock and settled elsewhere. The region began to develop after coming under the

control of George Thomas in 1871. Its people were described in the source as courageous, hardworking, and proud, with agriculture and pastoralism remaining important sources of livelihood.

According to the source, Haryana currently comprises 22 districts. A population estimate from the 2012 census is cited as approximately thirty million, while the number of Haryanvi speakers dispersed across other provinces, border regions, and different parts of the country is presented as substantially higher. The article also discusses the migration of Haryanvi-speaking people to Pakistan during the partition of the subcontinent.

Researcher Kunwar Nisar Ahmad is quoted as describing Haryanvi as one of the major languages of Punjab and as widely spoken in Pakistan. He regards Haryanvi, Punjabi, and Saraiki as major regional languages of Punjab and emphasizes the close relationship between Urdu and Haryanvi. The article consequently presents Haryanvi as a major linguistic tradition of the wider subcontinent. Before discussing its evolution, however, it is necessary to examine its historical background.

Historical Background of Haryanvi

The article traces the historical development of Indo-Aryan languages through the movement of Aryan groups from Central Asia into other regions. One group is described as moving westward, while another entered India through Iran. Within India, these groups settled in different regions, including Sindh and central India. The article associates the arrival of the Aryans with the introduction of Sanskrit and the subsequent interaction between Sanskritic and indigenous linguistic traditions.

The source further states that after several centuries another group entered India, and Persian began to exert an influence alongside Sanskrit. Referring to Nasir Hussain Khayal's *Dāstān-e Urdu*, it describes Persian, Iranian Aryan, and Indo-Aryan linguistic traditions as coming into renewed contact. The language brought by the ruling Aryan groups was primarily associated with conquerors, rulers, and privileged classes, whereas the common population continued to use Prakrit. The article therefore connects Indo-Aryan linguistic history first with Indo-European and subsequently with Indo-Iranian linguistic developments.

Dr. Shuja Namus is quoted as stating that Aryan groups entered India successively, beginning around 1500 BCE and continuing for approximately two centuries, and that they spoke an early Aryan language associated with the region around the Caspian Sea. The article uses this discussion to situate later North Indian languages within a long process of linguistic contact and transformation.

According to the article, the ancient texts and Vedic traditions indicate that the Aryans encountered and were influenced by Indian vernaculars, although Sanskrit remained elevated as a language of prestige. Sanskrit subsequently developed into Vedic Sanskrit and Classical Sanskrit. Vedic Sanskrit was used for the composition of the Vedas, while Classical Sanskrit became an important language of literary production.

Sanskrit gradually became distinguished from local speech and was increasingly restricted to learned and elite contexts. Major religious and literary works—including the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Ramayana, and Mahabharata—were composed in Sanskrit. Because of the growing distance between Sanskrit and popular speech, it did not remain the ordinary language of the masses.

The article then discusses the rise of Buddhism and the use of popular languages for religious communication. Gautama Buddha rejected social hierarchy and selected the language of the people for preaching so that his message could reach ordinary people. Pali, regarded in the article as a literary branch of Prakrit, consequently gained prominence as a religious language.

The text also discusses Greek, Turkic, Mongol, and Persian influences in the subcontinent. It states that after approximately the sixth century BCE, increasing distance emerged between literary Prakrit and popular speech. The popular forms came to be described as Apabhraṃśa, a term interpreted in the article as referring to a changed or corrupted form of language. From Apabhraṃśa, according to the source, several later languages and linguistic traditions developed, including Punjabi, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Bihari, Eastern Hindi, and Western Hindi.

Western Hindi included Khari Boli, associated with Delhi and its surrounding regions. The article argues that early linguists treated Haryanvi and Khari Boli as separate, whereas later linguistic discussion has emphasized their close relationship. The author's central position is that Haryanvi and Khari Boli represent closely connected forms of the same broader linguistic tradition.

Khari Boli and Its Relationship with Haryanvi

Numerous arguments are presented concerning the origin of Khari Boli. The article states that Khari Boli is older than the standardized forms of both Hindi and Urdu and that it played a foundational role in the linguistic development of the region. Dr. Sohail Bukhari is quoted as saying that Urdu and Hindi are two forms of one language which linguists have called Khari Boli.

A language or dialect may exist long before it receives its recognized name. The article gives Pali as an example, noting that although it existed before the Common Era, the name “Pali” was assigned much later. In the same way, the designation Khari Boli was introduced after the linguistic form itself had already developed.

The literary evidence discussed in the article suggests that Khari Boli possessed prose forms at an early stage. Since prose generally requires an established linguistic structure, the author considers early prose material evidence that Khari Boli functioned as a language rather than merely as an undeveloped dialect. Even in poetic material, scattered prose phrases are cited as evidence of its linguistic maturity.

Dr. Gyan Chand is quoted as observing that prose expressions occur in Khari Boli verse and that old Hindi contains prose material dating from very early periods. The article further argues that early Apabhraṃśa material contains recognizable features of Khari Boli, and that some compositions originally associated with Apabhraṃśa were later interpreted by Hindi historians as forms of Khari Boli.

The article consequently advances the view that Khari Boli was historically an established linguistic form and identifies it closely with Haryanvi. It cites Dhīrendravarma’s description of Khari Boli as the rural speech of communities around Delhi and Meerut, for which Grierson used the designation “Vernacular Hindustani.”

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji is quoted as considering Khari Boli the basic dialect underlying Standard Hindi, Hindustani, and Urdu. In literary usage, the term may also be used more broadly for modern Hindi literature in contrast to the literary traditions of Awadhi and Braj. The article thus treats Khari Boli as a central linguistic category with a broad geographical and historical range.

The article distinguishes Khari Boli from Braj on phonetic grounds, observing that Braj favors the “o” sound while Khari Boli favors the “a” sound. Some lexical borrowing between neighboring linguistic varieties is considered natural, but the author rejects the idea that Khari Boli should simply be derived from Braj.

Several scholars are discussed regarding the origin of Khari Boli, including Shaukat Sabzwari, who is quoted as arguing that Śaurasenī Apabhraṃśa produced Braj rather than Khari Boli. Other scholars associate Khari Boli and Haryanvi with closely related branches. Despite disagreements about precise classification, the article repeatedly emphasizes their geographical and structural proximity.

The article also notes that linguistic geography allows neighboring languages to influence one another. Since Punjab lies adjacent to the Haryanvi-Khari Boli region, Punjabi

influence is considered a natural historical possibility. Nevertheless, the author maintains that the strongest conclusion emerging from the discussion is the close relationship between Haryanvi and Khari Boli.

Khari Boli: Historical Development

Around the year 1000 CE, forms of the modern languages began to emerge within Apabhraṃśa. The article identifies Śaurasenī Apabhraṃśa as an important literary form associated with the Śūrasena region and notes that its influence extended as far as Bengal. As this linguistic form developed across a wide geographical area, regional variations emerged, eventually contributing to several languages, including Western Hindi.

Dr. Masud Husain Khan is quoted as stating that Grierson applied the name Khari Boli (Hindustani) to the Western Hindi variety spoken in western Rohilkhand, the northern part of the Doab, and Ambala in Punjab. Dr. Gyan Chand similarly describes Khari Boli as a language of a very extensive geographical area, with Haryana and the Ambala Division occupying a central position in its historical distribution.

The article further cites Dr. Ashraf Kamal, who includes Delhi and its surrounding areas within the geographical sphere of Khari Boli. Mirza Khalil Ahmad Beg explains the development of Śaurasenī Prakrit and Śaurasenī Apabhraṃśa from earlier regional varieties of Sanskrit and links these developments to the later Western Hindi languages. Khari Boli is presented as one of these branches and as an important contributor to the development of Urdu.

On the basis of these theories, the article concludes that Khari Boli emerged from an Apabhraṃśa form that had already absorbed features of indigenous languages of the subcontinent. It was spoken in the Ambala region, including the areas corresponding to Rohtak, Hisar, Jind, and Karnal. Several scholars cited in the article connect the emergence of Urdu with this linguistic tradition.

The author also emphasizes the historical importance of the region because Delhi rulers recruited soldiers from Ambala, Hisar, and Karnal, where local populations were regarded as physically strong and courageous. Through military, commercial, and administrative networks, the regional speech spread beyond its original geographical boundaries.

Haryanvi: Bangru and Jatu

The language spoken in the north-western districts of Haryana, including Karnal, Rohtak, and Hisar, is identified as Haryanvi. Bangru and Jatu are described as major dialectal forms. The present-day state of Haryana contains several distinctive dialects, along with smaller speech varieties associated with particular communities.

The name Haryanvi, according to the article, predates the Muslim period. The language was also present in Delhi and was historically prominent in the city's markets, where it became known as Jatu because of the strong presence of Jat communities around Delhi. Grierson is cited as treating Jatu/Haryanvi as a form of Khari Boli.

Amir Khusrau's *Masnavi Nuh Sipihr* is discussed in connection with the language of Delhi. The article argues that elements of Haryanvi can be detected in riddles and other compositions attributed to Khusrau. One example contains words such as *gāgar*, *saṛīr*, *lāgī*, and *niksan*, which the author regards as distinctly Haryanvi vocabulary.

The article considers Bangru particularly representative of Haryanvi. It associates the dialect with areas including Rohtak, Panipat, Jind, Hisar, Bhiwani, and Hansi. Other dialects listed include Bangru, Jatu, Ahirwati, Bagri, Deswali, Korvi, Nardaki, Powadhi, Khadri, and Rohtaki. The Odh speech variety is mentioned separately because of the historically mobile character of the community associated with it.

Dr. Masud Husain Khan is quoted as stating that the formation of early Urdu took place directly under the influence of Haryanvi. The article therefore considers Haryanvi significant not only as a regional language but also as a major contributor to the development of Urdu.

Historically, Haryana is described as having been divided into Bangar and Khadar. Bangar was associated with Bangri/Bangru, while the Khadar region had a strong Jat population whose speech was known as Jatu. The article records a Haryanvi proverb: "Qaus qaus pe pānī badle, tīn qaus pe bānī," illustrating regional variation in speech.

The geographical spread of Haryanvi is attributed partly to the movement of people toward Delhi. Because Delhi was an important commercial and political center, speakers from different regions interacted in its markets, allowing Haryanvi forms to spread into other speech communities.

Haryanvi and the Development of Urdu

The article connects the development of Urdu closely with Khari Boli and Haryanvi. It states that Khari Boli emerged from Apabhraṃśa during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in areas including Delhi, Moradabad, and Meerut, with the historical Delhi region also encompassing areas of Haryana. Since Haryanvi was present in Delhi's markets, the author considers it an important component of the linguistic environment in which Urdu developed.

The tradition of Ragni in Haryanvi folk poetry is mentioned, along with the name of Bahari Mal Jat as an early figure associated with this tradition. The article further argues that Haryanvi influenced not only northern Indian literature but also early literary production in the Deccan.

Examples are drawn from Bakhat Kahani, attributed in the article to Afzal Panipati. The cited verses contain forms such as *ḍarāve*, *satāve*, *birhā*, and *lāī*, which the author identifies as Haryanvi words or forms. The recurring verbal ending “-ve” is presented as another feature of Haryanvi usage, with examples such as *khāvegā*, *pīvegā*, *dhovegā*, and *sovegā*.

Further examples include words such as *kārḥ*, *kāg*, and *marm*. The article argues that these lexical items demonstrate the contribution of Haryanvi to the vocabulary and development of Urdu. The examples from Bakhat Kahani are presented as evidence of the influence of Haryanvi on neighboring literary traditions, particularly Urdu.

The article notes that Haryanvi itself has been influenced by neighboring languages in border regions. Urdu and Punjabi influence is associated with areas around Ambala, while Braj influence is discussed in the Mewat, Nuh, and Gurugram areas. Along the Rajasthan-Haryana border, contact with the language of Alwar is described as another natural source of linguistic influence.

The article also discusses the Rohtaki variety and emphasizes that “Rohtaki” should not automatically be understood as simply the language of Rohtak district; rather, it is presented as the name of a particular dialect that was historically spoken across a wider area of Haryana.

Shared Features of Haryanvi and Khari Boli

Modern linguistic discussion, as represented in the article, is presented as having established a close identity between Khari Boli and Haryanvi. The language is called Khari Boli because of its characteristic speech form and Haryanvi because of its association with the province of Haryana. The article argues that the two varieties are fundamentally similar in structure and pronunciation.

Ram Bilas Sharma is quoted through Dr. Masud Husain Khan as stating that Khari Boli is not an entirely separate popular language of the north-western region but rather a form of Haryanvi. The article presents this as important evidence for understanding the relationship between the two.

Additional evidence includes their classification within Western Hindi and the possibility of shared linguistic features. Grierson is discussed as assigning a particularly important role to Haryanvi in the formation of Urdu. Dr. Gyan Chand is quoted as describing Hindustani/Khari Boli as a regional language whose historical use extended across Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

The article notes that the name of Khari Boli has changed in different contexts, including Hindustani, Pakki Boli, and Sachi Boli. Dr. Gyan Chand is again cited as connecting the emergence of Urdu with the emergence of Khari Boli in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The author also refers to arguments that Urdu literature began in the Deccan but maintains that Khari Boli/Haryanvi features remain visible in early Deccani literature. The article states that Khari Boli and Haryanvi share important alphabetic and phonetic features. Ambaprasad Suman is quoted as observing the prominence of the sounds represented by “n,” “l,” and “d” in Bangru, identified here with Haryanvi.

The article explains that these letters receive distinctive pronunciations in Haryanvi, including retroflex or modified realizations. Such features are used to support the argument that Haryanvi and Khari Boli represent closely related forms of one linguistic tradition.

Jules Bloch’s discussion of Delhi and its surrounding dialects is also considered. According to the article, Bloch emphasized the importance of Haryanvi while describing Delhi as a meeting point of Khari, Haryanvi, and Rajasthani linguistic traditions. The author suggests that the distinction between Haryanvi and Khari Boli may partly have resulted from the failure of early scholars to recognize the internal dialectal diversity of the region.

Grierson is described as treating contemporary Haryanvi as a form of Khari Boli/Hindustani. The article argues that his conclusions about the antiquity of Haryanvi were limited because he did not have sufficient access to the relevant northern Urdu material. It further proposes that the differences he treated as evidence of separate languages may actually represent differences between the Bangru and Jatu dialects of Haryanvi.

Dr. Gyan Chand is quoted as noting that Urdu itself contains variation and that, alongside Khari Boli, Haryanvi and Deccani elements can also be identified, while the basic grammatical structure remains closely connected with Khari Boli. The article uses this observation to reinforce its argument that Haryanvi and Khari Boli share a common structural foundation.

Conclusion and Major Findings

The study concludes that Haryanvi is an ancient and historically significant language possessing its own literary and cultural heritage. The article emphasizes that it has a substantial body of literature and distinctive literary forms, including Ragni as a poetic genre and Saang and Sāqiyā as forms associated with its broader literary tradition. Treating Haryanvi merely as a dialect, according to the author, overlooks its historical and linguistic significance.

The author identifies several major conclusions. First, the common assumption that Haryanvi originated directly from Sanskrit is rejected. Sanskrit is characterized as a language of learned and ruling groups, whereas Haryanvi is presented as developing through the popular Prakrit tradition, from which Pali and other vernacular forms also emerged.

Second, the article rejects a direct linguistic derivation of Urdu from Braj Bhasha, while allowing for lexical borrowing between neighboring speech communities. Third, the geographical position of Haryanvi around Delhi enabled it to spread with migrating and traveling populations and to become influential beyond its original regional boundaries.

Fourth, the article maintains that Haryanvi exerted a substantial influence on the language of Delhi and on the early development of Urdu. Fifth, it argues that Haryanvi traveled with Muslim populations toward southern India and influenced early Deccani literary production. On this basis, the author presents the early development of Urdu as closely connected with the Haryanvi linguistic tradition.

Sixth, earlier linguists often treated Khari Boli as separate from Haryanvi, whereas the article interprets the name Khari Boli as referring to a characteristic speech form of the language associated with Haryana. Seventh, the article argues that Haryanvi developed as a structured language with its own linguistic rules and grammar rather than emerging merely as an unorganized dialect.

Eighth, Haryanvi existed long before modern linguists assigned or standardized its name. The article compares this process with Pali, whose name was also assigned long after the language itself had existed. Finally, the diversity of Haryanvi dialects is presented as evidence of its wide geographical spread and historical depth. Because the dialects differ significantly, ordinary speakers may perceive them as separate languages, just as Urdu itself contains multiple regional varieties.

The article therefore calls for further research by linguists, historians, and literary critics. It argues that future scholarship should revisit the historical relationship between Haryanvi, Khari Boli, and Urdu, examine regional dialects in greater detail, and bring forward linguistic evidence that can clarify the evolution of these languages.

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